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NBC Bay Area follows inspirational story

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NBC Bay Area follows inspirational story

NBC Bay Area in 2015 filmed a news segment about Yema Khalif Manyanki's '15 journey to Dominican. Yema grew up just outside Nairobi in Kibera, the largest urban slum in Africa. Thanks to a life-changing encounter with a Hollywood actress, Yema graduated with a degree in communications, earned his MBA degree in 2016 and is now CEO and Founder of his own startup business, YEMA Sports Apparel.

Yema, who delivered the undergraduate student address at commencement in 2015, was 24 and working on the Nairobi set of the movie *Lost in Africa* when he met actress Connie Nielsen. Many of the extras on the film were living in Kibera, and Nielsen visited the slum several times over the course of shooting the film. Her visits inspired her to form a nonprofit called [The Human Needs Project](#) and, through this organization, create the Road to Freedom Scholarship Program.

[CLICK HERE](#) to watch the NBC Bay Area feature on Yema.

[CLICK HERE](#) to see Yema's entire Commencement 2015 speech on YouTube

Yema, one of the first recipients of a Road to Freedom Scholarship, is a shining example of what happens when one combines education and opportunity. Yema arrived at Dominican in 2011 determined to embrace every opportunity that came his way.

"Gaining an education was a dream of mine," Yema recalls. "At Dominican, my dream has come true, and now my main priority is to use my education and the connections I made here so that one day I will be in a position where I can influence change."

During his four years at Dominican, he held five internships; produced and presented three shows for Dominican's online radio station; honed his leadership skills through the [summer LeaderShape program](#); served as a student ambassador for the [Office of Admissions](#); developed and executed a successful social media strategy for the [Department of Athletics](#); served as student body vice president; played four years of club soccer; performed each year in the student-produced Soul Candy; and participated in the American Conservatory Theater's prestigious Summer Training Congress. On top of this busy schedule, he has earned a spot on the dean's list every semester and, on March 25, 2015, he received the "Student Award" at the [Melba Beals Awards for Excellence in Diversity](#).

Yema's tremendous work ethic is grounded in his determination to give back.

Despite his busy schedule, Yema makes time each week to oversee the Human Needs Project's website and social media outreach. The San Francisco-based nonprofit's goal is to establish Town Centers to provide basic services (water, toilets, showers, laundry) and empowerment services (business skills training, micro-credit, WiFi cafe, health kiosk) in slums. The first center just opened in Kibera. It was built and is now managed and maintained by community members.

Inspired by the Human Needs Project, Yema's plan is to one day establish a network of "feeding centers" that will provide meals to people living in impoverished areas of the world. He started working on a business model last summer while participating in Dominican's LeaderShape Institute, a six-day residential leadership development program designed to help participants build leadership concepts and abilities.

"I started developing my plan in LeaderShape, and I will continue this work after graduation. This is my purpose for living, and thanks to the connections I have made at Dominican, I know that my passion – my desire to give back – will happen."

Yema credits a network of support, both on and off campus, for his personal transformation.

"Dominican was the perfect size for me because I was able to meet so many people, and such a great

diversity of people from all over the world,” he says. “I have formed close relationships with my professors, and these mentors have helped to guide me toward my career and toward my dreams. I would not have received this support at a large university where I would have just been another face in the crowd.”

He is particularly thankful to Brad Van Alstyne, chair of [communications and media studies](#), and Rabbi Henry Shreibman, assistant professor of [religion](#) in the [School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences](#), for their support and encouragement these past four years.

“I took a philosophy class from Henry Shreibman and liked him from the get go. He encouraged me to really think about issues. I enjoy the way he teaches and all of the concepts he wants students to understand. I also have a great relationship with Brad Van Alstyne. He has guided me and inspired me to follow my passion. He has shown me how it can be done.”

Van Alstyne notes that Yema is respected by faculty and students alike.

“He has amazing focus and drive. He just lights up a room,” Van Alstyne says. “He will be able to do anything and everything. I predict great things for him once he graduates.”

Indeed, it is hard to find a Dominican student who does not know – or at least know of – Yema. His vibrant, cheerful personality is evident as he walks across the campus, stopping frequently to talk with both students and professors.

“I’m a social guy and I like to talk with everybody,” he says. “I want to learn about people and their backgrounds. I enjoy sharing information and ideas. I feel a part of a great community here.”

It was Van Alstyne who encouraged Yema to pursue his interest in broadcasting by joining the Penguin Radio team his freshman year. Through the years, Yema has produced and presented weekly – and later bi-weekly – shows focused on sports, contemporary issues, and popular culture.

His experiences with [Penguin Radio](#) sealed his desire to pursue a career in communications and marketing after graduation. He worked as a research assistant for the San Francisco office of Los Angeles-based Bazooka Mama Productions, which makes music videos, documentaries, indie films and commercials. He then pursued his MBA degree in the Barowsky School of Business before launching his own sports apparel business.

“When I arrived, I was ‘green.’ I was new to the country and I did not have a lot of experience when it came to how the world works. I came, I learned, and I have such a better understanding about the world around me. Dominican gave me the opportunity to grow, and I left a far better person than the person I was in 2011.”